

2002 --- THE SHORTWAVE YEAR IN REVIEW ---
by Glenn Hauser for VOA, January 1, 2003

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[only portions aired on VOA; the entire Review lasting 18.5 minutes:]

SURROGATES

In 2002, Afghanistan was the target of greatly increased external broadcasting. The US started Radio Free Afghanistan January 30th, from several shortwave sites, not including Kuwait as planned.

Commando Solo's airborne Information Radio to Afghanistan wrapped up March 19, but frequency 8700 moved to the ground at Bagram. Solo was back in business December 12th, now targeting Iraq from Kuwaiti airspace.

Russia managed to delay but not prevent another new service from the US, Radio Free Chechnya, but only 2 hours per day.

More and more individually named services dilute US international broadcasting. Intent on influencing younger listeners in hostile countries, the US replaced VOA's Arabic Service with Radio Sawa, meaning together; and in December something like it for Iran, Radio Farda, meaning tomorrow; but VOA's Farsi service survives, while Radio Azadi is lost.

CLANDESTINES

In his annual survey, Mathias Kropf computed that in 2002, political clandestine broadcasting increased for the third year in a row, this time by 21 percent, that's more than 50 percent since 1999. Most of the growth has been in Asia and Africa.

The three most active target areas are Iraq, Iran and North Korea --- hmmm, the president thinks they have something else in common.

The seemingly successful Radio Voice of Afghanistan, based in London, decided to quit at mid-July.

Several countries became new clandestine targets: Radio Dat via Lithuania for Kazakhstan; Arabic Radio, a.k.a. Voice of the Homeland, for Syria; Voice of Free Lebanon, and for Sa'udi Arabia, transmitted by Norway, despite endorsing Bin-Laden, Voice of Reform.

More new clandestine services: Voice of Iran via France; For Zimbabwe, SW Radio Africa, and, despite a raid and a firebomb, Voice of the

People, via Madagascar. For several months, Madagascar itself had two competing governments, each with shortwave stations. For Nigeria, Jakada Radio International started in May and resumed in December.

The long-running Democratic Voice of Burma kept changing sites, Moldova, Austria, Norway, Madagascar, CIS, and at first secret, for five months from mid March to mid August, via New Zealand. Hmong Lao Radio based in Minnesota, emerged from obscurity.

In Colombia, FARC concentrated on FM, but at yearend Voice of Resistance was again reported on shortwave 6175, and even 10000 kHz.

JAMMING

Countries with too many transmitters and too little freedom of information can't help but use them for jamming. In 2002, jamming by China grew to epidemic proportions, even against Uzbek, a language spoken elsewhere.

Voice of Tibet has to change frequencies every day trying to escape jamming. Cuba and Iran are other heavy jammers, and Sa'udi Arabia now does it too.

DISASTERS

Fires R Us, says Andy Sennitt, following more flames at Flevo, damaging Radio Nederland transmitters. The same happened to All India Radio at Leh.

HCJB had to brave more volcanic ash on Quito, interfering with power supply and damaging equipment.

RKI antennas in South Korea for Europe and North America were damaged by a typhoon; and another typhoon, Pongsona, hit Guam in early December, knocking both shortwave stations off the air. KTWR's antennas were shredded, and KSDA's power supply was down for weeks, so some languages moved to Taiwan and UAE. In late December some shortwave antennas of Israel radio blew down.

Listeners are bracing themselves for more and more tests of Digital Radio Mondiale, which insists on mixing with analog signals. But DRM analog tests provided some unusual DX on 11 meters from Rennes, France. Station X in Queensland, Australia, plans to broadcast on 120 meters, perhaps as a precursor to a valuable digital license.

PEOPLE

At the beginning of last year, we welcomed back on the air Victor

Goonetilleke, with DX reports on Radio Korea International.

RVi Belgium's Frans Vossen was sidelined four months following an injury on the EDXC expedition to Estonia.

In Austria, Wolf Harranth retired from Intermedia, but the show goes on; and Chuck Roswell of Transworld Radio has retired, now moving back to the US.

Voice of Turkey lost the services of the Morali sisters, who hosted and produced so many programs including a new call-in.

Han Hee Joo at Radio Korea International, was promoted off the air into management.

The well-armed Steve Anderson of United Patriot Radio was finally caught in November after 13 months on the run. His former associate, Charlie Puckett of Kentucky State Militia Radio, did not evade capture so long, and was sentenced to at least 3 years in prison for weapons violations.

Brother Stair spent the summer in jail, charged with breach of trust and criminal sexual contact, but a vast tape library allowed his shortwave broadcasts to continue unabated.

Captain Cooke of pirate, Radio Dublin was convicted of sexually assaulting four girls at the station.

Among the expenses at BBC World Service, were settling a discrimination suit in London and a libel suit in Antigua.

Arnie Coro was invited to speak in Canada, but denied a visa at the last minute, tho unlike several younger Cubans at World Youth Day, he would not have defected.

The Wall Street Journal reported that another announcer at Radio Havana, Langston Wright, is actually a skyjacker named Michael Finney.

OBITS

In 2002 among the DXers who died was Bill Flynn of Oregon, who extended QSLing to internet listening.

Among the broadcasters was Canada's beloved Peter Gzowski. We're happy to report that Keith Glover, emeritus Radio Australia, was still with us contrary to Passport to Worldband Radio.

ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES

Finland decided it had nothing more to say to the shortwave world in English, but kept Russian and nearby vernaculars. Next door, Sweden adds more languages, even Kurdish and Arabic.

Spain dropped two of its three English hours to North America. But Radio Pridnestrovye, in part of Moldova, unexpectedly started a weekly half hour in English.

Deutsche Welle added the Romany language; HCJB, Low German.

Budapest added Italian, French and Spanish, and more English at the expense of neighboring tongues. RAE, Argentina, resumed Italian.

The Chinese Communist station in Lhasa started a show in English with the unlikely name, Voice of Holy Tibet, a big hit with DXers.

Iran had the chutzpah to start broadcasting in Hebrew to Israel as the Voice of David. Sort of like Radio Marti to Cuba.

QSL NEWS

More stations announced policies of no QSLs: Channel Africa, and Israel Radio.

Nepal tried a laserprinter on slick paper, so the letters flaked off in the mail. We were advised not to bother Radio Nepal with reports. But Bhutan sent verifications on handmade paper. Voice of Mongolia enclosed with their QSL, a bone, but don't call them a supermarket.

Vintage QSLs became valuable collectibles on E-bay, even \$358 for Radio Américas, Swan Island.

ANNIVERSARIES

It seems like more, but WEWN, Alabama, has just marked its 10th anniversary December 28th.

Radio for Peace International celebrated its quinceañera, or should I say, sesquidecade.

DX Antwerp celebrated its 20th anniversary with some special broadcasts.

Radio Tashkent, Uzbekistan, was 40.

Jiangsu Provincial People's Radio Station, in China, just became 50.

And BBC World Service celebrated its 70th anniversary in December; what will they do for the 75th?

In case I don't have a chance to mention it a year from now, 2003 marks the 50th anniversary of Deutsche Welle.

STRIKES AND STRIFE

Radio Canada International workers went on a one-day strike, which management extended to a two-month lockout.

After a falling out, the University for Peace in Costa Rica tried to evict Radio For Peace International from the campus.

PROGRAMS OFF AND ON

We mourned the loss of Communications World, but it seems Kim is finding ways to come back on the air. VOA Spanish started a new show for Cuba, Ventana a Cuba, despite Radio Martí. And some music found its way onto News Now.

Once a month we had to write off Write On, until BBC finally made it a weekly mailbag.

Brazil's only active 19 meter station, Radio Gazeta, São Paulo, on 15325, is all set to switch from religion to a student educational format today, but many other Brazilian stations remain rented out to evangelists.

RELAYS

More and more relays make it harder and harder to tell what country you're really listening to, not helped by creeping secrecy, now even infecting Canada, which we reveal, relays everything from communist China and Vietnam to evangelical Ecuador.

HCJB just missed a Christmas startup for its own new Australian transmitter, now set for January 5th. And it's definite that HCJB will tear down its transmitters near Quito, and move to the coast, starting this year.

WYFR added relays from more Merlin sites, Abu Dhabi, Ascension, South Africa.

Listeners would hardly notice that Merlin moved BBC short and mediumwave relays from Masirah island to a new facility on the mainland of Oman.

Lacking its own shortwave transmitters, Radio Afghanistan started an unreliable satellite feed to London for Merlin to send relays back to the country via Norway and UAE. Instead, we are treated hour after hour on 18940 to a 24 second loop of fill music, which John Cobb calls 'Fanfare for the Common Afghan.'

Also with a shortage of facilities, Congo DR started broadcasting via Gabon.

With cutbacks of their own external broadcasting, more time for hire became available, notably in Norway, amenable even to clandestines, such as Radio International to Iran.

Taiwan and France agreed to relay exchanges, even tho France already does the same with the other China. France also provides lots of shortwave time to Libya.

Angola's Catholic station Radio Ecclesia moved its relay from Germany to more convenient South Africa, but still cannot shortwave from Angola itself.

Radio Polonia's schedule expired December 31st, after a reduction in broadcasts. Perhaps that will finally lead to relays abroad over better transmitters.

IRRS could hardly afford to broadcast from Italy itself, hinting at secret high-power relays abroad. Just revealed as the silent partner to Alfredo Cotroneo since 1988 is Bob Zanotti, who took early retirement from SRI.

GONE FROM SHORTWAVE

Every year, we have an unfortunately growing list of countries and stations that have abandoned shortwave.

Radio Denmark fired all its shortwave staff, but remained on the air relaying domestic service only.

Switzerland continued phasing out shortwave, with the only target areas left: Near East, Africa and South America. But now you can pay for Swiss news by telephone!

Radio Austria International has been fighting to survive, a final decision postponed until March; meanwhile, its transmitters have growing relay business.

Not including Everest Radio which had a very specialized audience, Nepalis in Europe.

India plans to phase out domestic shortwave in favor of FM, but meanwhile inaugurates new transmitters, notably Jammu, Kashmir on 4830.

Abu Dhabi's own shortwave service, Voice of the UAE disappeared, so its transmitters could be rented out, even to Christians such as AWR, and World Beacon, which soon found SW not cost effective, and closed. But another gospel time broker appeared, called Bible Voice Broadcasting Network.

Yet again, Israel threatened to stop external broadcasting, but was finally convinced not to.

Malawi is another African country no longer present on shortwave. Lesotho too, but they plan to resume following repairs.

From Vladivostok, Radio Station Pacific Ocean quit shortwave, kept long and mediumwave.

Fewer and fewer Papua New Guinea stations are heard, but they go and come and go, resulting in a net loss.

Colombia's Idea Radio decided webstreaming would be better than shortwave.

Guatemalan shortwave stations are dropping off one by one, along with AM in favor of FM, tho one made a comeback, Radio Cultural Coatán.

US eleven-meter stations diminished, nothing more from Portland or Fort Pierce.

CHNX, Halifax, had a chance to come back, but refused resuscitation when Cumbre offered to donate a transmitter.

And after a final reprieve, Australian timesignaller VNG would mark no more minutes from today.

REACTIVATED

But the losses were countered by gains. Among the stations and services on shortwave reactivated in 2002:

Radio Yugoslavia, on September 19. And Radio Luxembourg came back on 6090, but for only one day, July 10. Radio Gardarika, St. Petersburg, Russia, was back at the end of the year.

Radio Veritas, Liberia, 5470 and Radio Togo, 5047. The UN Mission for

Eritrea and Ethiopia came back via transmitters in the UAE.

Indonesia's RRI Serui and Bukittinggi. Radio Free Bougainville returned as Radio Independent Mekamui.

Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa, Greenland, was reported back with very low power on 3815, but DXers have not been able to confirm it.

WJCR, Kentucky was revived by new owners as WJIE.

Clandestine to Cuba, La Voz de la Fundación, once a major shortwaver, returned on WRMI with a more modest schedule.

In Brazil, Radio Cacique, Radio Clube Ribeirão Preto, and Radio Nacional Amazonia are back.

Also demonstrating commitment to shortwave were RDP International, Portugal, installing a powerful new transmitter, and KSDA, Guam, systematically replacing its old transmitters with new ones.

NEW STATIONS

And there were new stations on the air, belying the claim that shortwave is a dying medium: Radio Veritas, South Africa; Radio Okapi, Congo DR.

Church services in Korean on 6715 were finally traced to, of all places, a Full Gospel church in the Canary Islands, 100 watts broadcasting to fishermen.

An obscure clandestine for Iraq appeared, called Voice of Ashur, or Assyrians.

El Salvador is back on shortwave, thanks to Radio Imperial; Radio America tries to put Paraguay on the map; among new Peruvians, or new names, were Radio San Lorenzo and, above 10 MHz, Radio Willkamayu. Colombia gained a new station called the Voice of Your Conscience, calling for peace in the civil war.

Replacing WWFV in Georgia was WWRB in Tennessee, adding more and more transmitters and an aeronautical facility called Nashville Radio. You might have thought Radio RSA was back, as WWRB played that old interval signal as a test. By the way, visitors will be arrested.

A new station tested briefly in North Carolina, so far only low power on 5920, WBOH. Still on the way from New Mexico, not yet on the air, is KIMF.

After testing last summer, Laser Radio in the UK has just started regular Sunday broadcasts via Latvia. Russia and/or Ukraine have lots of unofficial stations, notably Radio Krishnaloka, and now Radio Alex.

STATIONS ON AND OFF

Stations appearing again in 2002, but soon gone again, or irregular include: Cambodia on 11940

Radio Nacional Paraguay on 9737; Bolivia had an indigenous outlet called Bartolina Sisa Radio. Radio Baluarte is one name used by a pirate at the border of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Just when we need them, not much to be heard from Venezuela, Táchira on 4830, nor Torbes on 4980.

Whatever happened to Lubumbashi, Congo DR on 7435? Zimbabwe is just being heard again after an absence.

Radio Ukraine International contracts and swells, now supposed to be running a megawatt on 7375. But it's more reliable on its new webcast.

KICKERS

Unsolved mystery: why has Radio Prague in Spanish appeared on not one, but two US Coast Guard frequencies?

Radio Habana Cuba comes up with wild topics for its essay contests, about the Museum of Rum, and sexual rights.

Radio Taipei International admitted that its relayed programs, including news, are delayed at least two hours.

Another year and we're still waiting on: WBCQ's maritime mobile studio.

Greg Dyke had hundreds of BBC staff wearing silly hats in an effort at team-building.

And Harold Camping of WYFR declared that since we have radio, churches are obsolete.

For VOA News Now, I'm Glenn Hauser. ###